

Return to Collinwood

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Summary: Victoria Winters returns to 1991 only to find that Angelique has preceded her there.

1. The Return

> <meta name="Author"> Speculations, Episode 1

Return to Collinwood

****Episode One****

****Victoria Winters' eyes met Barnabas' and she remembered. Peter Bradford, serving as her lawyer had come to her cell near the end of her stay in the 18th Century and between them they had reasoned out that the vampires who had left a trail of death during 1790 and 1991 were one and the same. That vampire was Barnabas Collins. ****

****She recoiled instantly, gasping. Her face, filled moments before by tears of joy at her return and escape from the hangman's noose, was now covered with a look a sheer anxiety. It was a look not unlike the one that dropped into place over Barnabas' face as he came to the understanding that she knew everything. ****

****'How?' he wondered, his mind racing. 'Father and Ben would never have told THAT secret. Could it have been the "connection" she had with Josette?' ****

****Vicky forced herself to calm down, deliberately relaxing the look on her face. She wiped the tears from her eyes, taking the time to gather her thoughts. He hadn't asked for this, she knew. It was as much Angelique's doing as killing Jeremiah with the bullet Barnabas had removed from his gun. Or bringing Jeremiah back as a zombie to kill Josette. 'And framing me for her crimes,' she thought. 'She MUST have been involved in Sarah and Daniel's illness, too.' Those were all valid enough reasons for her to abandon her fear, but they were small compared to the knowledge that hit her suddenly, making her**

smile and hold out her hand to him. The knowledge that, despite what he had been turned into, she loved him anyway. **

**The worry that had blanketed Barnabas' aristocratic face faded, replaced in an instant by hope. He crossed the room without seeming to hurry and was at her side in moments. **

**She at last let completely go of Elizabeth's motherly embrace and turned to face him, her eyes first glancing over all her friends in the room. There was Elizabeth, whose eyes shone with joy. Roger, who seemed to be pleasantly surprised more than anything else. Vicky blinked. For a moment, where Maggie now stood, she could have sworn that she saw Angelique. She attributed the vision to the events of the past days catching up with her. **

**Slowly, she swung her legs over the side of the bed as yet another burst of thunder echoed from outside. Barnabas helped her to her feet, his gaze gentle. Vicky remembered seeing a similar expression when he had spent any time at all with Sarah. **

**"Cousin Elizabeth," Barnabas said, "may we have a moment?"
**

**"Of course," she replied, still beaming. "I'll have Mrs. Johnson put something on the stove for you, Victoria." **

**"Thank--" Vicky coughed and rubbed her throat. She could still feel the scratchiness of the rope used to hang her. "Thank you."
**

**Angelique, in charge of Maggie's body, glared at them as she, along with Roger and Doctor Hoffman, was herded out of the room by Elizabeth. **

**"You know," he stated. **

**She nodded slightly. "It was the night Angelique brought Jeremiah back, wasn't it?" **

**"She attacked me with a knife that night and was stabbed with it herself in the struggle," Barnabas replied, turning and walking toward the window. "It was then that she..." He took a deep breath. "You must be careful, Victoria. She has not done me the courtesy of staying dead. We held a second seance to bring you back, but Angelique took advantage of it to possess Julia Hoffman. Maggie Evans exorcised her just the other evening." **

**Vicky's memory flared and the vision she'd had just a minute before, of Angelique standing in Maggie's place, repeated itself several times. "Barnabas, I think she's in Maggie now." He spun hastily around to face her as she continued. "I looked at Maggie for a second when you came over by me and I saw Angelique instead. But then I blinked and it was Maggie again. I thought maybe I was just mixing the two years in my mind, but... Barnabas, how did you find out about Doctor Hoffman? What did Angelique do?" **

**"She killed someone. Someone who was about to hammer a stake through my heart. Willie found her standing over him with the knife in her hand, babbling in French. There was no way to arrange for him to be found that wouldn't have ended with Sheriff Patterson hunting

me down. We buried him as Ben and I buried Angelique, on the grounds of the estate." He looked away, debating whether or not to tell her everything. "It was your friend, Joe Haskell." He paused. "We must find another exorcist," he said decisively. **

**Vicky closed her eyes at the news of Joe's death. "Carolyn really loved him," she sighed. "I know where we can find an exorcist," she stated, determination filling her voice. Angelique had hurt so many of Vicky's friends, had even framed her for witchcraft. This was simply the final straw. "Maggie and I were having lunch one afternoon and we started talking about her 'gifts.' She mentioned the priest who taught her about exorcisms. He's pastor at Saint Mike's." **

**The Drawing Room... **

**Roger handed his older sister a sherry as he sat down next to her on the couch. He sipped at his brandy and leaned over, whispering conspiratorially in her ear. "So, do you plan on finally telling her?" **

**"Too much has happened to the family lately," Elizabeth replied. "I will tell her when I am sure the troubles are over. It's wonderful to have her back, isn't it?" **

**** ** ** **

**Ten Minutes Later... **

**Doctor Julia Hoffman sat at her desk, writing in her journal. After Michael Woodard had found it, she'd been sorely tempted to burn it. But the entries within were the only notes she had made on the method of Barnabas' treatment. Now that Victoria had returned, she was sure that he would want to restart the injections any evening now. A knock at the door disturbed her thoughts. **

**"Are you there, Julia?" Barnabas' voice came through the door. **

**"So soon?" she thought, her heart beginning to pound faster. "Come in," she replied. **

**The door opened and Barnabas stepped into the room. Julia looked up over her glasses at him. He glanced appraisingly about the room. "An excellent choice of rooms," he said. "Thank you," she replied. "Is something wrong with Miss Winters? Or would you like to begin the treatments again?" **

**"Tonight, Julia," he smiled at her, "I am here for something more urgent. During your exorcism, Angelique moved directly from you into Maggie Evans." **

**Startled, she got up out of her chair. "What can I do to help?" **

**"We will be contacting a priest to perform the exorcism, but I will need to administer an injection that will render her unconscious long enough for it to be performed." **

**"How did you--Did she kill anyone else?" **

**"Victoria looked directly at Miss Evans and saw Angelique instead."
**

**"How do you expect to administer this injection? Surely she'll be on her guard against any attack." **

**"My dear Doctor Hoffman," Barnabas responded, a thin and dangerous smile crossing his face, "her own curse will be her undoing. Not even Angelique can see me in a mirror." **

**** ** ** **

**Meanwhile, at The Blue Whale... **

**Sam Evans scrubbed diligently at the dried, caked-on mess that stained the bar, mumbling to himself as the thirty year-old banker who'd made the mess walked out the door. Wearing a blue dress shirt and black slacks, Sheriff George Patterson walked up to the bar from the entrance and sat down on the stool next to the one which had just been vacated. He smiled wryly at Sam. **

**"Evening, Sam. Somethin' wrong?" **

**"I've seen dogs with better table manners than that punk who calls himself a businessman." He sighed. "At least he leaves a good tip."
**

**"He'd better since he inherited the Fourth Bank of Collinsport."
**

**Sam chuckled. "What can I do for you tonight, George?" **

**"Seen Joe Haskell around lately? He came into my office the other day, saying that the real vampire who killed Daphne was still around and if we wouldn't do anything, he would. Haven't seen hide nor hair of 'im since. I'm startin' to get worried." **

**"Well, he's supposed to be by tomorrow morning to help me remodel my garage. Maggie says I'll end up having a heart attack if I try to do it alone. The way she 'sees' things, I'm not about to take my chances. When I see him, I'll tell him you were looking for him. Want anything to drink?" **

**"Coffee, black. There's a lot of paperwork waiting for me back home." **

**The Old House, Just Before Sunrise... **

**"Willie," Barnabas said just before climbing into his coffin, "this afternoon, an hour before sunset, I want you to go to Saint Michael the Archangel's on Sixth Avenue. There, you will tell Father Timothy that Maggie Evans has been possessed by the ghost of a witch named Angelique and that he should meet Miss Winters and myself here at 8:30 tonight to perform the exorcism." **

**"Yeah, sure Barnabas," Willie said, cringing at the memory of what had happened last time she had possessed someone. He'd never gotten along well with Joe Haskell, but she'd just killed him like he was nothing. **

**** ** ** **

**Later That Afternoon... **

**Willie parked his truck in front of the rectory of Saint Michael the Archangel Church on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Amadeus Collins Street. He waited a heartbeat for a car to pass him by, then opened the door and stepped out onto the street. He walked around the front of the truck, stepped onto the sidewalk, walked up up to the front door and rang the doorbell. The ancient-looking parish housekeeper opened the door and motioned for him to come inside.
**

**"Welcome to Sssssaint Michael'ssss," she lisped. "May I help you, ssssir?" **

**Trembling slightly, he wiped the sweat from his forehead with his right sleeve before speaking. "I'm here to see Fa--Father Timothy about an exorcism," he said finally. He'd never much liked places like this even before Barnabas had bitten him. Now, he was nervewracked. **

**"Come into the waiting room," the wispy-haired woman replied.
**

**Willie followed her down the hall into the waiting room, which had the appearance of a very old library, with shelves of books lining every wall. All of its furniture appeared to have been handcrafted in oak. He sat down on a plush chair and fidgeted while waiting for the priest to come out of his office. When the door opened after five minutes, Willie looked up sharply to see the robust, sixty year-old Father Tim walking towards him. The priest ran his hand through his white hair and walked over Willie. **

**"Welcome to Saint Michael's, my son. Mrs. Thomason tells me you're here about an exorcism. I believe I can help you." He extended his hand. "My name is Father Timothy Trask." **

**** ** ** **

**Collinwood, Thirty Minutes After Sunset... **

**Barnabas stepped quietly, needle in hand, onto the carpeted hall of the second floor of Collinwood. The possessed Maggie Evans stood before the mirror, practicing her mannerisms. Carefully, he walked up behind her as she adjusted the collar of the blouse she was wearing. He plunged the needle into her as Julia had directed, then caught her as she passed out. **

**The Old House, 8:30 P.M.... **

**Barnabas and Vicky sat in the study, waiting for the priest to arrive for the exorcism. They had both been shocked earlier when Willie had mentioned Father Tim's last name. But not nearly as shocked as even earlier when, despite the injection, Maggie had begun talking to them. She claimed that the serum had only knocked out Angelique, weakening her hold on the body enough to make only a minimum of effort necessary for regaining control of her own body. Maggie had also warned them that Angelique would be back in full

force after the serum wore off. She'd also insisted they take precautions in case Angelique returned and tried to get her hands on something to use as a weapon. The method she chose was to have her hands tied with rosary beads, a task which fell to Vicky.

**

**"Where IS he?" Maggie complained. The next instant, they heard the sound of the front door opening and closing. Moments later, Father Trask walked into the study. **

**"Thank GOD you got here!" Maggie exclaimed fervently. "Their knockout drug let me get back in control, but the witch is stirring. I can feel her. Hurry!" **

**Father Trask pulled a vial of holy water from his shirt pocket and began to perform the rite of exorcism. As the first drops of the sacred water touched Maggie's body, Angelique roared in pain inside her. The priest sweated profusely as the rite progressed, calling upon God to intercede and evict the dangerous spirit from the body it had taken on. Barnabas and Victoria added their own silent prayers and fervent hopes as the hours passed. Finally, they could all see Angelique's spirit being shot out of Maggie. She hovered above them, fuming and violently angry. **

**"I will return and you will suffer for your interference, Victoria Winters," she swore. With that, she disappeared. **

**** ** ** **

**Somewhere In Florida, Four Weeks Later... **

**With curtains drawn closed and the room in total darkness, Angelique, in the body of her new host, sat in a pentagram in the middle of the room holding a clay voodoo figure in her left hand. "Return to Collinsport, Jeremiah Collins!" she cried out, casting her spell. "Whatever name you now bear, in whatever body you live, I call to you. Return, Jeremiah. Return!" **

**** ** ** **

**Two Days Later At The Blue Whale... **

A medium height, red-haired, mustached young man, looking bewildered in a blue business suit, walked through the door. Hesitantly, he walked up to the bar and sat down. Sam broke off a conversation with one of his regulars and walked over.

**"Welcome to The Blue Whale," Sam said. "I'm Sam Evans, the owner. What can I get for you tonight, Mister...?" **

"Burke Devlin. What do you recommend for someone who's thoroughly confused and needs a good meal to think things out?"

**"First," Sam replied, "I'd recommend the baked haddock with slaw, tartar sauce and fries. To go with it, I'd say water if you need to relax. Then, head on over to the jukebox, drop in a quarter and pick H-11. That always soothes my nerves. Will you be needing a place to stay?" Burke nodded. "Then try The Miranda DuVal over on Williams Avenue. The owner's a friend of mine. If you tell him I sent you, he'll give you the discount rate." **

**"Thank you, Mister Evans. I appreciate it." **

To Be Continued...

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2. Episode Two

> <meta name="GENERATOR"> Speculations, Episode 2

Return to Collinwood

**Episode 2 **

> The Next Morning...

> <p>

Burke Devlin opened the door of The Blue Whale with his left hand as he unzipped his dark-green, spring jacket. Removing the jacket, he walked over to the bar and sat down.

**Sam walked over to Burke, reached underneath the counter and brought out a menu. He put the menu down in front of Burke and pulled his ordering pad out of his apron. "Good morning, Mister Devlin."
**

"It certainly is. Thanks for the tip on that hotel. I don't think I've ever found that kind of luxury THAT affordable. I had a wonderful night's rest." He looked over the menu, then looked back up at Sam. "I'll have the sausage and eggs. Over easy and some of that freshly squeezed orange juice."

Sam wrote down the order, took the menu and put it back under the counter. "Have you had any luck with that problem you mentioned last night?"

Burke smiled wistfully. "I should be so lucky," he replied, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "I don't even UNDERSTAND it. I was on the fast track in the legal department of Kramer Industries down in Boston until just a few days ago. Then I started feeling the urge -- the 'need' to just quit my job, pack up and leave town. And I loved the work I was doing and the people I was working with. But it felt like I had no choice at all in the matter. I HAD to do it. So yesterday I finished packing, tossed everything in my car and didn't stop driving until I ended up here. And now that I'm here, I just 'know' this is where I'm going to be spending my life." He sighed. "Now I need a job."

**"Well, the head of Collins Family Enterprises' legal division just retired a few days back and from what I hear, everyone in the department is falling all over themselves NOT to get chosen as his successor. Apparently, the pressures nearly drove him nuts. Or maybe

it was just visiting Collinwood one time too many. That place'll spook anyone out. Either way, no one wants it to happen to them. If you think you can stay sane, I'll call Roger Collins and set up an interview for you. He's seein' my daughter and doesn't think I know about it. Hmph. I'm not THAT blind." He smiled cheerfully.**

"I would definitely appreciate it, Mister Evans. I don't suppose you know where I can get a street map. Doubt I'll be able to find my way around here these first few weeks without one."

"I keep 'em in stock over by the register. I can get you one now if you want to get a head start on studying it. And call me Sam. That's what everyone calls me."

"All right, then call me Burke. And thanks for all the help you're giving me." He extended his hand over the counter and they shook.

>

> ** ** **
>

**Ten Minutes Later...

>
 Maggie shoved open the door that led from the kitchen to the area behind the bar. She strolled briskly over to her father, greeting him with a quick kiss on the cheek.

>
 "Good morning, Dad," she said cheerfully.

>
 "'Morning, Maggie. Have you seen Joe around lately? He never showed up to help me with the garage yesterday and George Patterson's been looking for him too. Joe doesn't think Mike Woodard's the one who attacked Daphne and George thinks he may be in some kind of trouble."

>
 Maggie's stomach clenched violently and her eyes widened as the vision overtook her. Two men in the woods, their backs to her with shovels in their hands. A body thrown in a pit, dirt tossed onto its face before she could identify it.

>
 She exhaled sharply and blinked, startled to find herself back in the Whale. No matter how used to the visions she had become, being jerked back into reality afterwards was still unsettling.

>
 "Something wrong, Maggie?" her father asked.

>
 "I just 'saw' a burial," she replied.

>
 "Joe's?" His voice was concerned and nervous.

>
 "I couldn't see any faces. I don't know." She shook her head, clearing the image from her mind.**

>
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> <p>

**Later That Afternoon, The Drawing Room of Collinwood...

>
 Roger and Burke sat across from each other, with Roger studying Burke's resume and muttering the highlights to himself.

"Accepted into Harvard Law School at...18? Top five percent of the class." He looked up from the paper. "Mister Devlin--Burke, why haven't you gone into private practice with these credentials?"

>
 Burke thought about giving him an understandable explanation, but settled on the truth instead. "Simply put, Mister Collins, I'd be bored in private practice, no matter how much better I'd be financially. It just doesn't hold the same thrill for me that working

for a business does."

>
 "Passing a chance at six figures from fear of boredom almost makes you odd enough to be a Collins," Roger responded with a chuckle. "And Sam Evans said your urge to leave Boston was so uncontrollable it might as well have been supernatural. Well, you'll find that the unnatural is rapidly becoming the norm here in CollinSPORT." He pulled a folded piece of paper out of his shirt pocket and handed it to Burke. "If the salary and benefits there are to your liking, you can start tomorrow."

>
 Burke unfolded the paper, read it and smiled. Still holding it in his left hand, he stood up and extended his right hand. "It's gonna be a pleasure working for you, Mister Collins."**

>
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>

**Meanwhile, In Dr. Hoffman's Room...

>
 Julia sat at her desk, writing in her journal. Next to her left hand, a paperweight slowly began to slide towards the edge. She heard the scratching sound it made on the desk and glanced away from the journal, her eyes looking for the source of the noise. Those eyes widened as she watched the slide accelerate until the paperweight slid completely off the desk, hovering a moment in mid-air before falling to the ground. A book flew past her face, crashing into the wall. A test tube flew into the opposite wall, between the windows, and another one poured itself out of the floor. Maintaining as much decorum as she could muster, Julia left the room at high speed.**

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>

**30 Minutes Later, In the Hallway of Collinwood's West Wing...

>
 Vicky walked along the dusty, damp hallway of the West Wing, calling David's name. The last time she had been here was when she followed Sarah's ghost to her diary. She stopped short and sniffed the air. 'That's odd,' she thought, 'where's that kerosene smell coming from?'

>
 She walked forward to where two doors stood directly across the hall from each other. Opening the door on her right, she looked inside and saw that no one was there. Stepping back out into the hallway, she went to check the opposite room, but stopped when she saw the figure of a child in white out of the corner of her right eye. Vicky turned to see the ghost of Sarah Collins standing further down the hall, pointing at a door that was on Vicky's left.

>
 Victoria half-jogged towards Sarah, but the child vanished. Vicky turned to her left, opened the door and went in. There, standing in front of an antique table, was David. On the table were a half-gallon can of kerosene with a nozzle on its top, a book of matches, a piece of chalk and a figure of straw in the shape of a man. Around the figure, drawn in chalk, was an inverted pentagram.

>
 In a zombie-like monotone, young David mumbled some words Vicky could not quite hear as he picked up the canister or kerosene.

>
 "David, NO!!" she yelled before he had the chance to begin pouring out the contents of the can. He dropped the can, shivered, then looked up at Vicky.

>
 "Miss Winters? What happened?"

>
 "You missed your English lesson," she replied, telling him only half of the truth. "Now let's go. We can't have you missing your history lesson too."**

>
 ***** ** ** **
>

**10:00 P.M. That Evening...

>
 Barnabas stood beneath a tree on the grounds of the vast Collins family estate, in the part of the woods closest to the great house. He looked to the mansion, knowing instinctively that he was standing in a direct line from Carolyn's bedroom. With his eyes red and his fangs extended, he reached out for her, willing her to come to him.

>
 In her room, she heard his summons and rose from her bed. She threw open her windows and stepped out onto the grounds, following the voice in her head. He was waiting for her beneath that same tree. When he stretched out his arms to her, she fell instantly into his arms. They kissed, and for a brief moment he found the strength to resist his bloodlust. But the moment passed quickly and he sank his fangs into her neck. In the distance, dogs howled.**

>
 ***** ** ** **
>

**Collinwood, 11:00 P.M....

>
 Roger sat in the drawing room reading a complete collection of the poems of Edgar Allen Poe. Turning the page, he heard a loud knock at the door. He waited a minute, but no one answered it. He swore, then looked down at the cover of his book. "If that's The Raven, I'm moving to Alaska," he said with a half-smile as he stood up, entered the Great Hall, went over and opened the front door. The book fell out of his hand and his jaw dropped all the way open.

>
 "My God! Laura."**

>
 ***** ** ** **
>

**Simultaneously, At The Blue Whale...

>
 A man, with an oval face and dark black hair that was pulled up into a ponytail, walked up to the pay phone outside the restaurant, dropped in a quarter and punched in the number for Collinwood.

>
 "Hello," he said, unbuttoning the first button on his grey trenchcoat. "Is Elizabeth Stoddard in? No, don't wake her. In the morning, would you tell her that her cousin Quentin Collins, Daphne's father, called and I will be by around noon. Thank you."

>
 Quentin smiled the contagious kind of smile that could spread across a crowded room in seconds. After over twenty years away, he had come home to make up for leaving his daughter behind. He was sure that he would see her tomorrow.**

>
 ***** ** ** **

**The Old House...

>
 Barnabas was sitting in a chair, reading through Sarah's

diary. A strong breeze blew the pages through to the end. His eyes widened as new writing flowed across the page. "Oh, my brother," it read, "the danger has not yet passed."**

To Be Continued...

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>

3. Episode Three

> <meta name="Author"> Speculations, Episode 3

Return To Collinwood

Episode 3

Roger stood in the doorway, staring at his wife. He couldn't help but notice how dramatically her appearance had improved since the last time he had seen her, six months into her stay at the sanatorium. There, her face had been gaunt and pale; her milk-chocolate colored hair dull and limp. Her eyes then had seemed to be staring at something only she could see. Now, her face was full, the color had returned to her cheeks and the glowing smile that had first attracted him to her was back in force. Her hair was shorter now, only shoulder-length where it had been halfway down her back when the fire had occurred, and done in the loose-curl style that he remembered so fondly. Her blue eyes were joyous, full of life. "How--" He cleared his throat. "How did you get here?"

"They just released me this morning. I wanted to get here sooner, but there was a three-hour delay on my flight, which made me miss the train from Boston. I've missed you, Roger. And David. Is he well?"

At that question, Roger snapped out of the reverie her deep, sensuous voice had put him in. "Yes, I think he finally is. Now that Elizabeth's found a governess he isn't able to scare off, anyway. Do you have any bags with you?"

Laura laughed lightly. "I thought just my release would be enough of a shock for you without just trying to pick up where we left off. It's been a long time and you might want a few days to make any...decisions. So I took a room at the Collinsport Inn and left my bag there before coming over. Well, my cab IS waiting."

"If you MUST stay at the Inn, at least come in for a light drink first. I can drive as well as any cabbie."

"Certainly better than this one, anyway," she chuckled. "Just let me pay him."

**Roger stared after her as she walked from the doorway to the yellow cab. Just a few months ago, he'd made the painful admission to

Elizabeth that if it would have saved Laura's sanity, he'd have left David in the burning room. It was an admission he had to tear out of himself and one that left him with a powerful sense of shame. Now, it seemed possible, even likely, that he could at least try to have both. As he watched her reach into her purse for her wallet, he found himself wondering if he had really meant that admission. Was it too late to save their marriage? Had it been too late from the first night he'd spent with Maggie Evans? He sighed. It was going to be a long night.**

**** ** ****

Collinwood. The Next Day, Noon...

The sun shone down brightly and, for a distinct change, barely a cloud hung in the sky. Elizabeth stood near a window in the drawing room and looked out to where David was playing. She smiled. It was at times like this that she could almost forget all the troubles that had visited the family over the past four months. Daphne's death. Mike Woodard turning out to be the vampire who had killed her. The strange events following the seance. And storms the likes of which Collinsport hadn't seen since the last years of the 19th Century.

She turned as she heard a knock upon the drawing room doors, suddenly remembering the message that had been relayed to her at breakfast that morning. Quentin was in Collinsport to see his daughter. She wished she had not taken upon herself the responsibility of telling him about Daphne's death. Roger volunteered to stand with her when she delivered the news, but he had to make a decision on the future of his marriage, so she "pulled rank" as his older sister and told him to leave it to her.

"Send him in," she said absentmindedly when a voice announced his arrival. She looked up to see him standing in the doorway. 'My God,' she thought, 'it's been over 20 years since he left Daphne in our care and he looks like he hasn't aged a day.' "Quentin, welcome back to Collinwood. It's been a long time."

"Far too long," he replied, crossing the room and hugging her. "Is Daphne in? I've got a lot explaining to do."

Elizabeth looked closely at him. Before he had left Collinwood those years before, she had often tried teasing him into revealing his age. Not once had she been successful. Yet she knew that he must be either Roger's age or her own. And he showed absolutely no signs of it. There were no wrinkles anywhere to be found on his face, nor could she see a single strand of gray hair. He seemed to have completely stopped aging. She shoved her curiosity aside. The answers to her questions would simply have to wait. "Perhaps you'd like to sit down," she suggested.

Quentin took off his navy blue jacket, put it on the back of a chair and sat down. Elizabeth pulled up a chair and sat across from him. "Is something wrong, cousin Elizabeth?" he asked in his deep, rich voice.

**She sighed, drew herself up straight and looked him directly in the eye. "Quentin, Daphne 'died' about four months ago. She was the victim of a vampire attack. We tried to protect her, but one night

she...got onto the grounds. We found her body the next day. On the night of the funeral, she came back, attacking her fiance. The sheriff and his men found her the next night and stopped her before she could kill him. This sounds ridiculous, I know. But every word of it is true."**

Quentin closed his eyes and forced back tears. First his wife and then his daughter. Both had fallen victim to vampires within months of each other. He stood up abruptly, turned towards the drawing room's entrance, took a step, then stopped. Sighing, he ran his hands nervously through his hair. "I--I wish it did sound ridiculous, Elizabeth. The man who kidnapped Daphne's mother, who I hunted and chased for all these years, he too was a vampire." His voice was suddenly soft, almost a whisper. "What he did to her, what he made her become...she couldn't live with it. He'd kept her restrained for nearly ten years so she wouldn't end her existence, so she could suffer with what she was. When I finally dealt with him, we had one--one last night together before we took a walk in the forest and she..." His voice cracked and he made no effort to complete the sentence. Elizabeth walked over to him and put her hand on his right shoulder. He reached over with the opposite hand and gripped hers tightly as the first tears ran down his face.

"Most of Daphne's things are still in her room," she said. "If you'd like to see them..."

Tha--Thank you. I'd like that."

**** ** ****

Outside Collinwood, 2:30 P.M....

Laura stood on the path to Collinwood's front door, watching her son as he bounded up to the door. 'God,' she thought, 'doesn't anyone ever take him to get a haircut?' A brief flash of queasiness flashed through her stomach as she opened her mouth to call to him.

"David!" she yelled. He spun around and stared quizzically at her, knowing that he knew her, but not remembering how. "David, it's me. Your mother." She walked over to him. 'He doesn't know me,' she thought angrily. 'I'm his mother and he doesn't know me.' She got down on one knee and hugged him tightly. "It's so good to be back home!" she exclaimed.

"Mom? Dad said you were in the hospital. Are you OK now?"

"Yes, honey. I'm fine now. Especially now that I'm here with you." David flinched in embarrassment as she pinched and lightly shook his cheek. "Is your father home? I'd like to talk with him. AFTER I get all caught up with you."

"Nah. He's at the gallery, getting ready for his show next week. But no one's supposed to know it's him. He doesn't like to talk about it." He took out a 19th Century pocket watch he had found while playing with Sarah in the West Wing one time. She had insisted that he keep it. "He's supposed to be back in fifteen minutes."

**Laura gaped at the design on the cover of the watch. 'Noah's watch.

How?' "That's a beautiful watch, honey. Where did you get it?" "It was in one of the Wings when me and Sarah were playing there. Sarah's my friend. She's a ghost."**

I see," Laura replied, forcing a smile. 'Well,' she thought, 'here we go again.'

**** ** ****

The Old House, 8:30 P.M....

Barnabas sat silently in front of the fireplace, listening to the crackling of the logs and watching the flickering of the flames. Victoria was back in this time and in his life. If he ever wanted to walk along the beach with her on a warm spring day, or to grow old alongside her, the time had come to take action. He turned his head to look at Willie, who was standing off to the side. "Willie, go to Doctor Hoffman and tell her I would like to see her."

As Willie scampered out into the hall, Barnabas stood up. Knowing Willie, it would be nearly an hour until he returned. An hour in which Barnabas would have nothing whatsoever to do.

He left the drawing room and walked briskly to the library. Once there, he scanned the shelves. Most of the books had been purchased less than a month before and the majority of them had been recommended by Julia. She said that they represented the best in literature from the past two hundred years. His eyes lighted upon a hardcover edition of DRACULA. He still could not fathom why she had recommended that, of all books. Perhaps she had a more ironic sense of humor than he had credited her with. He decided to take the opportunity to finish it, pulled it from the shelf above his head and went back into the drawing room. Less than ten minutes later, he heard a knock upon the door. 'Why is it,' he thought, 'that lately I have only gotten visitors AFTER I've sent Willie somewhere?' He set the book on the floor next to his favorite chair, went to the door and opened it.

"Victoria. Come in." He helped her remove her coat and put it on the rack for her. "I hadn't expected to see you tonight."

"I saw something strange tonight. Daphne's father just showed up in Collinsport last night. Barnabas, he looks exactly like Jeremiah." Barnabas' eyebrows shot up.

**** ** ****

9:30 P.M....

Willie stood in the hall of the Old House, talking to his aunt on the phone that Barnabas had had installed just the day before. The two of them had to move the coffin to the mausoleum the previous night and Willie's arms still throbbed with a dull ache. "Oh, but Auntie," Willie whined plaintively into the receiver, "do I gotta go meet cousin Ellen? Me and her, you know we don't get along."

**"Willie," Mrs. Johnson replied, "aside from yourself, Ellen is the last of the Loomises. You will meet her at the train station and the two of you WILL get along. And when you get back, I'll have your

favorite suppers waiting for the two of you."**

"Oh, all right," Willie gave in. "Listen, Auntie, I gotta go. I didn't get any sleep last night and I'm startin' to see things that just ain't there. Yes, I promise to take better care of myself. I love you too, Auntie Johnson." Willie hung up the phone and blinked to try to clear what he thought he had seen from his eyes. When he opened them again, the vision of a knife hovering before the doors to the drawing room was still there.

To Be Continued...

* * *

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4. Episode Four

> <meta name="Author"> Speculations, Episode 4

Return to Collinwood

Episode Four

**Willie hung up the phone and blinked to try to clear what he thought he had seen from his eyes. When he opened them again, the vision of a knife hovering before the doors to the drawing room was still there. **

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**The Drawing Room of the Old House... **

**Barnabas rubbed his arm at the spot where Julia had plunged the serum-bearing needle just a minute before. It had been several weeks since he had reverted to full vampiric status and in those weeks, he had managed to forget the searing pain that the injections brought. **

**Julia finished reloading her medical bag. She bit back a flash of jealousy as she watched Victoria walk over to Barnabas from her position next to the fireplace out of the corner of her eye. From her time as host body to Angelique's vengeful ghost, she knew that jealousy had been THE factor that led the witch to try to destroy Barnabas' entire family. **

**Julia was determined not to let that same emotion overcome her. It had, once, and that had led to his biting Carolyn. Which had led to the confrontation at the Old House where the spirits of both Angelique and Sarah had appeared. Which led to seance that sent Victoria back in time. Which led to the second seance that had resulted in Angelique possessing her body and killing Joe Haskell. She didn't even want to think what the consequences might be if she ever gave in to that emotion again. **

**She picked up her bag and turned back to them to say her goodbyes. She had just opened her mouth when they heard Willie plaintively call out Barnabas' name. **

**Barnabas stood up and turned to face the drawing room doors. What is it, Willie? he replied, exasperation obvious in his voice. **

**Willie screamed, the sound followed almost immediately by the sound of something being thrown violently against a wall. The doors burst completely open, smacking up against the walls to which they were attached. The vision that greeted their eyes shocked all three. Willie was inexplicably lying in a heap against the far wall. But it was the other sight that caused the blood to drain completely from Julia's face. **

**The knife glistened as it hovered in the doorway. Hovered just like all the books and beakers, and even her bed had been hovering these past few weeks. The knife floated into the room, briefly pausing in front of Barnabas before it continued on towards Julia. She stumbled back against the mantel, but the knife followed her, coming to a stop just a centimeter in front of her throat. It absorbed the blows Barnabas delivered in his attempts to knock it away from her and stayed there for a full minute before collapsing to the ground. **

**Vicky crossed over to Julia's left side and squatted before her, delivering the same advice about taking deep breaths that Julia herself had delivered to numerous patients. **

**Barnabas, Victoria. Will you help me up? I have to attend to Willie. **

**Of course, they replied in unison, each grabbing one of her arms and lifting her to her feet. **

**** ** ** **

**The Following Evening, On A Train Outside of Collinsport... **

**A young woman sat with her head resting on the window. Her eyes were shut in sleep, her long, light-chocolate hair flowing over the hand and arm that supported her head. The aisle seat next to her had been vacant for the entire trip, just as she had planned. It was that seat the porter leaned over as he gently shook her awake. **

**Excuse me, ma'am, he said. You wanted to be told when we were a half-hour out from Collinsport. **

** she sighed, her deep, rich voice dripping with sweetness. She smiled at him, the glint in her dark eyes cutting through the pretended vacuousness of her smile. Thank you, my dear Mr. Clarke. And no, there will be nothing else that I require. **

**She turned to face the window as he walked away, her thoughts coming back to the reason she had come all this way to Collinsport...To Collinwood. Oh no, Barnabas,' she thought. I am not through with you yet.' The dim reflection in the glass of the window

was that of Angelique. **

**** ** ** **

**Dr. Hoffman's Room At Collinwood, Tuesday, 7:58 P.M.... **

**Julia Hoffman paced with the speed of a cheetah as she waited for the priest to arrive. She had politely but insistently turned away all of Barnabas and Victoria's questions about why a ghost would want to terrorize her, using Willie's injury and need of treatment as an excuse. The simple truth was that she hadn't a clue as to the ghost's reasons. And she knew, as they would if they gave it any thought, that their suggestion was simply unsafe. After what had happened the last two times, she most definitely would NOT allow a seance to be held. **

**No, it would take a priest to take care of her problem. And that meant a priest willing to perform short-notice exorcisms. That priest was Father Trask, who had once jokingly referred to himself in a conversation with Barnabas as the fastest exorcism east of the Mississippi. **

**She checked her watch. Only thirty seconds had passed since the last time she had checked it. A minute and a half left until he was due to arrive. She tried to swallow and found that her throat was parched. A glass of water sat on the desk where she had placed it fifteen minutes earlier. Hesitantly she walked over to get it, half expecting the water to suddenly transform into blood. Whatever she felt for Barnabas, she had no intention of sharing his unusual diet. She lifted the glass to her mouth and took a sip. She smiled, then drank down the rest of the still-pure water. **

**The sound of her doorknob turning made her jump slightly. She turned to see Father Trask standing there. It was good of you to come so quickly, Father, she greeted him. I thought I could live with this, but things have gotten out of hand. **

**Yes. You mentioned as much when you called me. Well, I'm sure you'll be wanting to get this spirit out of your life quickly, so shall we begin? **

**Of course. **

**The sixtyish priest pulled the equipment needed for the rite of exorcism from his jacket's pockets and set it on Julia's desk. He then tossed the jacket aside and began the rite. **

**Halfway through the rite, a crackle of static, followed by a high-pitched whine and then a male voice came through her turned-off radio. Excuse me, Father, but this is really none of your business, the voice said, even as Father Trask ignored it and continued with the exorcism. **

**Behind the priest, the closet doors slid apart and one of Julia's suitcases flew out and struck him in the head, rendering him unconscious. Sorry about that, Father, the voice spoke softly. Suddenly, Julia felt tendrils of raw hatred reaching out for her from the radio's speakers. This is NOT over, the spirit growled. With that, a loud squeal burst forth from the speakers and the tendrils of emotion faded away. Julia scrambled over to her phone and called for

an ambulance. **

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**The Collinsport Art Gallery. Wednesday, 8:30 P.M.... **

**Maggie stood in front of a large painting of the Collins family as it had been over 8 months ago. She remembered the feeling of impending doom that had washed over her when Carolyn had shown her the picture that Roger had chosen to paint from. She'd just had no idea that it would strike so soon. Or that Daphne would be its first victim. But, she asked herself, hadn't there been earlier warning?
**

When she and Daphne had been children, before they had even become teenagers, they had been to see a Gypsy fortune-teller. The seer, whose first name Maggie could no longer remember, had told Maggie's future readily enough. After beginning Daphne's, however, he had stopped, turned pale and insisted that they leave at once. With that warning and the feeling' from the picture, she wondered why she hadn't seen Daphne's fate coming. Why she hadn't been able to stop it.

**Wordlessly, her hand reached out to almost touch the spot on the painting where Daphne had stood at the seated Elizabeth's right hand. She heard a voice behind her. Startled out of her reverie, she spun around to face her mentor. **

**Father Tim! she cried, smiling. They hugged. **

**Maggie, my girl, how're you doing? Haven't seen you around church much lately, Father Trask said. **

**Well, with all the trouble at Collinwood recently, I just haven't had the time. What happened to your head? **

**Aah, a suitcase flew out of a closet and hit me while I was in the middle of an exorcism. I'll need some help if I'm to attempt the rite again. Not to mention a written guarantee the woman's put her luggage somewhere else. He chuckled lightly at the last statement. Too many of those who had borne the name Trask down through the centuries had no sense of humor whatsoever. And there were still members of other branches of the family who carried on that tradition as well as those of overzealousness and cruel self-righteousness. **

** Maggie replied, after getting possessed myself the last time I tried an exorcism, I'm a little uneasy about doing another one. But if you need help... Her voice trailed off as she saw that Father Trask was glaring across the room at someone, his eyebrows lowered and his mouth clamped shut. She turned her head to see who he was looking at and winced at the evil she felt emanating from the woman. It was Laura Collins. **

**It seems we'll soon have more to worry about than ghosts and flying luggage. Be careful around this woman, Maggie. If even I can feel the evil in her... **

**** ** ** **

**The Streets of Collinsport, 11:30 P.M.... **

**Barnabas walked down the road, enjoying the night air. He smiled, feeling relaxed. From the time he had awakened and received yet another of Julia's treatments straight through his pleasant conversation with Father Trask, the night had been truly peaceful. More than anything else, that had surprised him. If anyone had told him that he would ever feel kinship for a Trask, he would have testified in open court that that person needed to be committed to a psychiatric institution. And yet this Trask had none of the attributes of the one who'd had Victoria hung for witchcraft. **

**The car, tires squealing loudly, came around the corner at a high speed. It slammed into a tree on the other side of the street from him, knocking the tree over. With superior eyesight born of his vampirism, Barnabas could see that the only person in the car was the driver. Without thinking twice, he dashed across the street and pulled the driver from the wreckage. To his surprise, the driver was Maggie Evans. **

**** ** ** **

**Quentin's Room at Collinwood. Thursday, Just After Sunset... **

**Quentin sat at his desk, writing in his journal. Outside, the full moon rose leisurely. On the mantelpiece, an old statuette slowly changed its appearance from his image to that of a snarling werewolf. Oblivious, he kept writing. **

**It's now been over a hundred years since I left this town and still the clouds cast their shadows over Collinwood. Knowing what I know of vampires, I am not convinced that the man alleged to have attacked Daphne was actually guilty of it. I can only hope that it was not the same man who held Jenny in his clutches all these years. **

**Of more immediate consequence, my mother lives again. The Phoenix has risen from the ashes of the cottage where she tried to burn me to death when I was ten. I saw her yesterday at the Gallery, talking with Roger, her husband. The color of her eyes and hair have changed in the past 120 years. But that is all that has changed. I would still recognize her anywhere. Elizabeth tells me that, in a bout of Mother tried to burn down the home she, Roger and David were living in while they were still in it. David, my half-brother, I must and WILL protect you. **

**There is something strange about Mrs. Johnson's niece, Ellen Loomis. I can sense an almost-dormant supernatural presence about her. Will none in this family EVER have normal lives? **

**** ** ** **

**The Old Collinwood Stables. 5:00 P.M. The Following Day... **

**Willie walked past the long-abandoned stables on the shortcut path he took from Collinwood to the Old House. Something didn't smell right. He turned to see smoke and flames pouring out of the stable's windows. Stopping short, he remembered that David had taken to occasionally playing in there. He tried to run towards the door only

to find himself being violently shoved out of the way as the stable exploded. He looked up to see an older man resembling himself, but with weird clothes, a strange hat and an eyepatch. He wasn't there, the man said as he dissolved into nothingness.**

To (Eventually) Be Continued...

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End
file.